



B'NAI B'RITH INTERNATIONAL

Global Anti-Semitism and the State Department's 2004 Human Rights Report

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Hearing

Before the

Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations

**Committee on International Relations
U.S. House of Representatives**

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1:30 p.m.**

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank you for the privilege of addressing this hearing on behalf of B'nai B'rith International and its more than 110,000 members and supporters.

Your role, and that of your colleagues on the International Relations Committee and on the U.S. Helsinki Commission, has been invaluable to the global effort to promote human rights. You have helped guide U.S. policy in this area and have fostered international cooperation both in the struggle to expand

human rights generally, and in particular, in the effort to combat anti-Semitism, which will be the topic of my remarks today. I would also like to acknowledge the dedicated work of Assistant Secretary of State Michael Kozak, whose Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor has compiled the State Department's 2004 Human Rights Report. Two months ago, Assistant Secretary Kozak's bureau also produced the Report on Global Anti-Semitism, consistent with the Global Anti-Semitism Review Act of 2004 – another initiative for which you deserve great credit, Mr. Chairman. The work of Ambassador Ed O'Donnell, who has focused on anti-Semitism and Holocaust-related issues since 2003, has also been essential to this concerted effort.

As a member of the U.S. delegation to the OSCE's Vienna conference on anti-Semitism in 2003, and as an advisor to the U.S. delegation at the Berlin anti-Semitism conference last year, I am encouraged by what I feel to be the many positive developments that have resulted from these OSCE-sponsored gatherings. I hope that the follow-up conference in Cordoba, Spain this June will prove similarly productive.

The Berlin conference was long overdue. With the exception of the Vienna meeting the year before, and a brief seminar on the subject hosted by the European Union earlier in 2004 – both of which helped place anti-Semitism on the world "radar screen" – no collective body since 1945 has met to discuss, and act, on hate crimes committed against Jews.

What we have seen in Europe over the past decade has been a series of meetings, the adoption of legislation, and the creation of commissions and committees on Holocaust-era restitution issues. But nothing so coordinated or prioritized regarding anti-Semitism has been attempted.

Compounding the problem has been the "blinders-on" view of many European leaders about the demonization of Israel and Zionism, which has

become a pernicious – and regularly-accepted – form of modern-day anti-Semitism. Rather than characterize, for example, the comparison of Israel to Nazi Germany, or violent acts against Jews and Jewish communal properties as outright anti-Semitism, the initial reaction of some leaders to these acts was dismissive, with many ascribing such incidents or portrayals as “legitimate criticism” of Israel, or as the “pranks” of disaffected youth. This was especially true when such acts were carried out by individuals from the growing Arab and Muslim communities in countries like France and Belgium.

It was therefore of particular note that the historic Berlin Declaration, which provided a blueprint for combating hate crimes against Jewish individuals and institutions, specifically addressed the growing problem of anti-Semitic attacks being committed by opponents of Israel’s policies toward the Palestinians. The passage stating that “international developments or political issues, including those in Israel or elsewhere in the Middle East, never justify anti-Semitism” should be a wake-up call to those who try to justify hate crimes with politics.

But despite these decidedly positive developments, some of the data presented in the State Department’s 2004 Human Rights Report reveal a disturbing increase in anti-Semitic activity in certain countries.

In France, where the problem has been most acute over the past five years, authorities recorded a rise of more than 50 percent in the number of anti-Semitic incidents in 2004 compared to 2003, bringing the total number of acts in the most recent year to 950. However, the report also noted about France, “Authorities vigorously condemned anti-Semitism, increased security at Jewish institutions, investigated all attacks, and arrested and prosecuted perpetrators when there was sufficient evidence.” Furthermore, in December the State Council banned the transmission in France of al-Manar, a Lebanese Hezbollah satellite channel which aired an anti-Semitic television series during Ramadan in 2003.

In the United Kingdom, where London Mayor Ken Livingstone recently compared a Jewish journalist to a “German war criminal” and a “concentration camp guard,” the country experienced a similarly significant increase in anti-Semitic violence. According to the State Department’s recent report, the number of acts in Great Britain ballooned from 163 in 2003 to 310 in 2004. Incidents targeting Jews also increased in Belgium last year.

In Russia, according to the report, “while the number of anti-Semitic incidents remained roughly stable [in 2003], the nature of the attacks had become more violent.” And while Russian officials, including President Putin, have condemned anti-Semitic activity and prosecuted some offenders, some local and regional officials have minimized the extent of the problem by dismissing anti-Semitic violence as simple “hooliganism.”

One particularly disturbing episode occurred in Russia earlier this year, when more than 500 public figures, including 30 members of the Duma, signed a flagrantly anti-Semitic letter calling for a ban on Judaism and Jewish institutions. The fiery missive, from which the Russian Foreign Ministry has publicly distanced itself, called Jews anti-Christian and accused them of performing ritual murders.

Both the recent human rights report and the earlier anti-Semitism report cited a finding by B’nai B’rith Canada’s League for Human Rights that anti-Semitic incidents north of the U.S. border had significantly increased in 2004. However, the State Department reported no increase in anti-Semitic activity in Argentina, which is home to Latin America’s largest Jewish community, and which is also where the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires was bombed 13 years ago today. Argentina’s Jewish organizations have reported their ongoing concern about attacks and threats, though, despite the government’s attempts to combat anti-Semitism.

With the advent of last year's Berlin conference, the demonization of Israel has now been broached in an international forum, but the parameters of the problem have still not been defined. European leaders will need to summon the political will and courage to acknowledge the dangers of anti-Israel hatred and to act forcefully against it. This means recognizing that anti-Israel sentiment is growing fastest among Arabs and Muslims, in the Middle East and in Europe – a realization that, until now, European officials have not been swift to achieve.

The two State Department reports reveal clear indications that anti-Semitic literature and media coverage is a common feature in the Arab and Muslim world, as well as in European countries with large Arab and Muslim populations. In Europe, these communities have immediate and regular access to Arabic-language cable TV networks like Al Jazeera; print publications; and Internet sites, all of which offer predictably one-sided, inflammatory coverage of the Arab-Israeli conflict. These outlets employ primitive Jewish stereotypes in service of their anti-Zionist message, often borrowing symbols and motifs from Nazi propaganda so as to evoke the virulent anti-Semitism of *Der Sturmer*. Thus, one sees images of Jews as ghoulish, even satanic, caricatures with misshapen noses, festooned with dollar signs or carrying money-bags, and of Israelis bearing swastikas or drinking the blood of children. (As attachments to my written testimony, I have included several recent editorial cartoons from the Middle East and Europe that are representative of this trend.) Meanwhile, Arabic editions of *Mein Kampf* sell briskly in London and other European capitals.

In Iran, where an Olympic athlete was lavishly praised by his government for avoiding his obligation to compete against an Israeli opponent last summer, a viciously anti-Semitic series called *Zahra's Blue Eyes* began airing on national TV less than three months ago. Filmed in Farsi and dubbed into Arabic, the series depicts Israeli doctors posing as United Nations medical workers whose true purpose is to harvest bodily organs from Palestinian children. In Egypt and Syria, anti-Semitic and virulently anti-Israel content abounds in the press. The

Egyptian government maintains that it has advised journalists and cartoonists to avoid anti-Semitic themes, but anti-Semitism is nonetheless found in both the state-sponsored and opposition media. Meanwhile, Syrian school textbooks not only contain rabid anti-Semitic material; they teach children that Zionism is more egregious than Nazism, that Israel's very existence is intolerable, and that the Jewish state must be destroyed.

Another major issue at the Berlin conference was the matter of how best to monitor acts of anti-Semitism, Europe-wide. While the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) serves as the OSCE's own monitoring arm, it has only recently begun to carry out any kind of systematic process of gathering accurate data on anti-Semitic acts in the OSCE member-states. For there to be a coordinated approach to combating the phenomenon, one needs to have factual information on what is happening, and where.

ODIHR's involvement in this effort is indispensable, and it must be provided with the necessary funding to implement this information- and data-gathering process. And yet, even on this question, some member-states initially balked, citing budgetary concerns or doubts as to whether national governments could demand such information from provinces or states.

To capitalize upon the progress made at the Berlin conference, OSCE member-states should actively carry out their own recommendations. Some of these proposals include an informal exchange of "best practices" between nations; government support for anti-hate programs; assistance in facilitating the prosecution of anti-Semitic crimes; and the promotion of academic exchange and educational programs.

Furthermore, as we look forward to the Cordoba conference this June, there must be ongoing work in the areas of legislation; law enforcement; education; media; and general monitoring of anti-Semitic hate crimes. Progress

in these spheres will require a continuation of the collaborative effort of friendly countries and NGOs in order for the promise of Berlin to be realized in a serious way. Education ministers and justice ministers, for example, should regularly meet in multilateral forums to develop an ongoing form of cooperation on matters related to anti-Semitism and hate crimes. Governments should actively support the important work of the International Task Force on Holocaust Education. And as OSCE member-states create legislation, they should call on the experience of NGOs – many of whom met the day before the opening of the Berlin OSCE plenary and agreed on their own highly detailed proposal to combat anti-Semitism – to assist them in this effort.

Another action the OSCE could take to elevate the problem of anti-Semitism on the organization's agenda, now that a special representative has been appointed to deal with the issue, would be to extend his term, which is currently scheduled to expire on December 31. German parliamentarian Gert Weisskirchen, who has been appointed by and is working closely with the OSCE chair, should have the prestige, the profile, and the resources – on an ongoing basis – to bring the OSCE's influence to bear in addressing the problem.

Mr. Chairman, European leaders attending opening ceremonies at the Yad Vashem Holocaust museum in Jerusalem just yesterday vowed to fight the rising anti-Semitism in their countries. In a moving display, leaders such as German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer and French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin promised to be vigilant against the world's oldest and most resilient social pathology. But as the evidence in the two recent State Department reports indicates, much work remains to be done in this regard. The incidents and statistics detailed in the 2004 Human Rights Report and the Report on Global Anti-Semitism, some of which I have cited in my remarks today, are painful reminders of the urgency of the problem we continue to face.

As we gauge our progress in the struggle against anti-Semitism, let us draw reassurance from the positive atmosphere of the Berlin conference and the promise of the Cordoba conference, but let us also commit ourselves to sustaining the forward momentum of these gatherings. Sixty years after the Holocaust, and nearly five years after the start of the current rise of anti-Semitism in Europe, let us embrace one of the central messages of the Berlin conference: that complacency and passivity in the face of anti-Semitism can no longer be tolerated.

Thank you.



Akhbar al-Khalij (Bahrain), January 2005

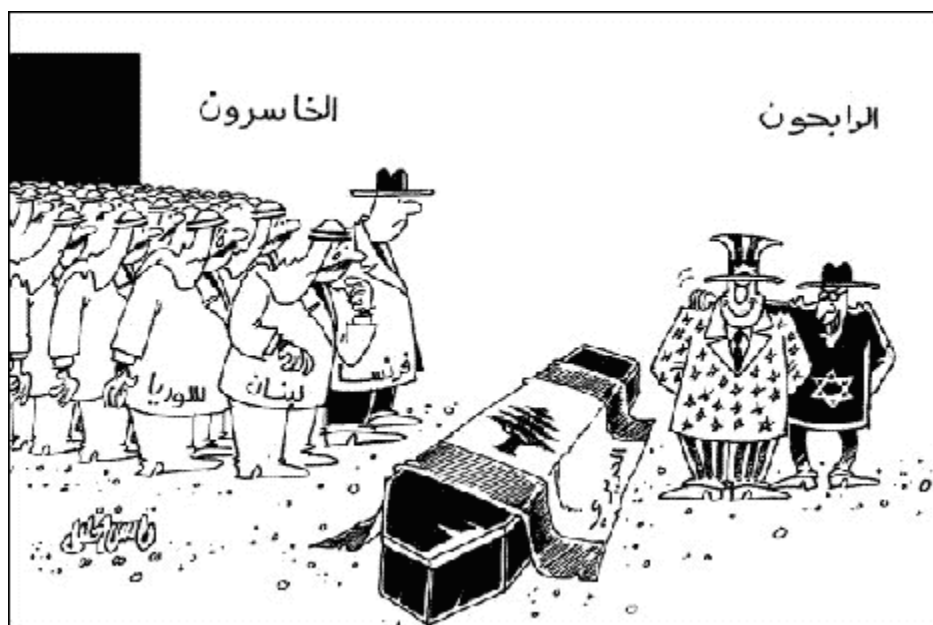


Al-Wafd (Egypt), March 27, 2004



Tishrin (Syria), February 23, 2005

The UN and "Foreign Intervention" are causing "Lebanon" to fall into the grave dug by the Jew.



Al-Watan (Oman), February 25, 2005

On the coffin: "Al-Hariri"; on the right, "The Beneficiaries", and on the left, "The Losers – France, Lebanon and Syria".



The Independent (United Kingdom), January 27, 2003



La Voz del Interior (Argentina), January 30, 2005

Argentine President Nestor Kirchner as a stereotypical Jew



Kleine Zeitung (Austria), May 19, 2004

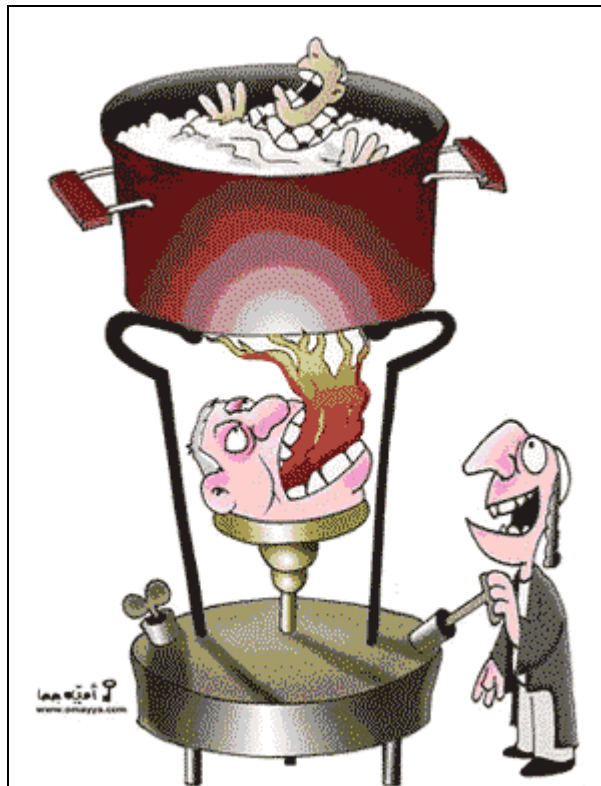


Al-Watan, December 7, 2004 (Qatar)

On the suit is written: "Azzam".



Ar-Riyadh (Saudi Arabia), March 8, 2004



Al-Hayat al-Jadida (Palestinian Authority), May 4, 2004

A Jew is lighting the fire, on which a pot full of water and the Arab is boiling